













AMA-SX

INDIANAPOLIS LUCAS OIL STADIUM - MARCH 17th - ROUND 1

Supercross winner: Ryan Villopoto, Kawasaki SX Lites East winner: Blake Wharton, Suzuki

LAST WAN STANDING

Words and phoros by Steve Cox





Ship, during most years, the title chase is basically over. For 20 years it has more or less been like this with Jeremy McGrath dominating seven from eight years between 1993 and 2000 then Ricky Carmichael doing likewise from 2001 until 2006, only losing the title when he sat it out with a knee injury. And in the end, most of the series' were decided well before the final round, even in the years when MC or RC didn't win them. Although 2011 was definitely an exception to this rule, it's looking like it's back to the norm for 2012 with the current campaign now two-thirds of the way done.

Ryan Dungey effectively dropped out of the title chase after finishing second in St. Louis with a broken collarbone – unbeknownst to most in the pits or stands. Chad Reed was eliminated a few rounds before that with a multitude of injuries. And now, in Indy, James Stewart lost all of the momentum he gained with his win in Daytona by opting out of the night program in Indy and scoring no points at all. Amazingly, Ryan Dungey is still second in the standings and he hasn't raced for two weeks.





But meanwhile, out front, Monster Energy Kawasaki's Ryan Villopoto is just doing business as usual. He had won four main events while Dungey and Reed were still healthy, and after Indy, he has increased that total to six. Six wins and a 54-point lead over Dungey. He has another 15 points on Stewart, putting him 69 points ahead in the title chase. He is six points away from a lead of 75, which if he

maintains that gap for the next three rounds up until New Orleans he will clinch the championship with three full events still to run. His domination comes through consistency and health. Consistency means he has only finished off of the podium only twice in 11 rounds – a fourth place in Los Angeles and a fifth place in Daytona – and has won more than half of the races he has entered.



And there's no slowing him down. He's well aware of the position he's in and he's being careful. Villopoto has a reputation of being a 'balls to the wall' racer and he can be when he has to be, for sure, but at this stage in his career he's also very calculating. He was prepared to settle for second in Indianapolis to Justin Brayton but perhaps the irony of this is that by slowing down on the very slippery Indi-

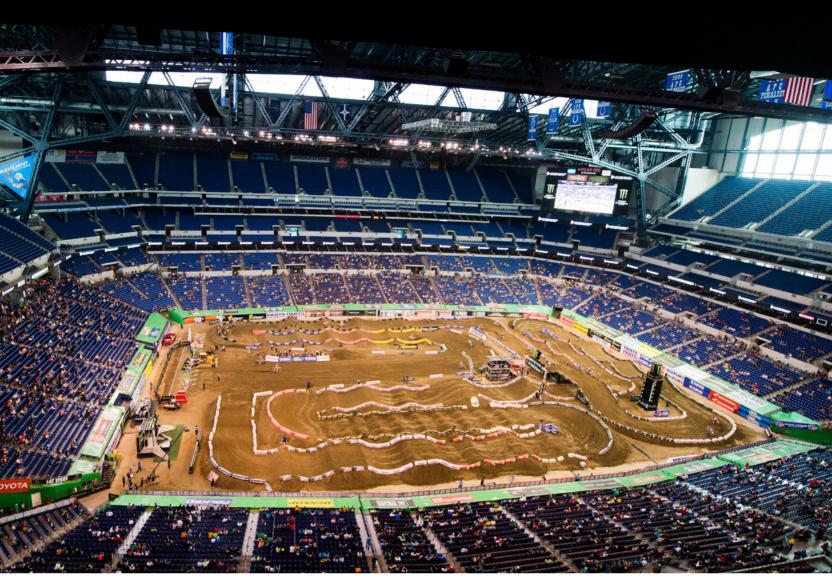
anapolis racing surface, it made him faster and he caught Brayton almost unexpectedly. From here, the Villopoto train moves to Toronto before the series heads back west again, hitting Houston, New Orleans, Seattle, Salt Lake City, and then Vegas. And the way things are going, he can be holding up his second-consecutive number-one plate as early as Louisiana.











AMA-SX CLASSIFICATION & CHAMPIONSHIP

AMA SUPERCROSS RESULT

Riders				
1	Ryan Villopoto, USA	Kawasaki		
2	Justin Brayton, USA	Honda		
3	Davi Millsaps, USA	Yamaha		
4	Brett Metcalfe, AUS	Suzuki		
5	Cole Seely, USA	Honda		

AMA SUPERCROSS STANDINGS (AFTER 11 OF 17 ROUNDS)

Riders		Points
1	Ryan Villopoto	246
2	Ryan Dungey	192
3	James Stewart	177
4	Davi Millsaps	151
5	Kevin Windham	146

AMA SUPERCROSS LITES WEST COAST RESULT

Riders				
1	Blake Wharton, USA	Suzuki		
2	Darryn Durnham, USA	Kawasaki		
3	Justin Barcia, USA	Honda		
4	Blake Baggett, USA	Kawasaki		
5	Jake Canada, USA	Honda		

AMA SUPERCROSS LITES EAST STANDINGS (AFTER 5 OF 8 ROUNDS)

Ri	ders	Points
1	Justin Barcia	120
2	Darryn Durnham	98
3	Blake Wharton	97
4	Blake Baggett	80
5	Ken Roczen	80



HEAD-CASE...

By Steve Cox

ames Stewart has never been the kind of guy who could or would settle for anything short of winning. Heat races, main events, overalls, championships... It's always about winning. Period. And it always has been.

When he was still racing 125s in his early years as a pro, Stewart literally - on at least two occasions - knocked himself out (or at least knocked himself silly) in practice but still showed up to race...and won. There's simply no guit in the guy. Which is why it was such a surprise, in some ways, that he didn't line up to enter the LCQ and make the gate in Indianapolis.

At the previous race Stewart went out in the mud in Daytona and won in convincing fashion. Riding that wave, he came into Daytona feeling good and seemingly in good spirits. He was one tenth of a second behind points leader Ryan Villopoto's lap times in practice and he made a few changes to his YZ450F before the night show to accommodate the slick conditions. But his evening lasted mere seconds. Just past the first turn in the first 450cc heat race he slipped and became a member of a pileup that also collected Kevin Windham, among others. He left the track on the back of the Asterisk Medical Mule looking kind of angry.

Unlike in 2010, when he fractured his wrist in a heat-race crash in Phoenix, or numerous other times when he has been in a similar situation, he didn't show up to race the LCQ in Indy.

Well, firstly he really wasn't very close to Ryan Villopoto in the title chase but more importantly, the AMA and Asterisk (the safety crew guys, who have had their work cut out this season) are putting together baseline reading for as many racers as they can in regard to mental acuity.

Stewart hasn't yet given them a baseline but the guys from Asterisk went to the Joe Gibbs Racing Yamaha team and told the crew that it was up to them to judge Stewart's alertness and see if he should or shouldn't race. And the team - including James and his dad Big James - decided it was best if he sat it out.

There is 'no quit' in the guy and it was a surprise he didn't show for the LCQ...

Not much is known about any injury at the time of publication but the former champ tweeted: "I'm very sore & will get checked out when I get back to Florida. Bummed 4 my team & fans. Still trying to put what happen last night together."

Whether James has to join the crazily-long list of riders watching instead of riding or he'll be able to gear-up in Toronto remains to be seen. However Indianapolis was a groundbreaking decision for Stewart. But in a weird way, it could very well end up to be a change for the better.

DROPPING LIKE FLIES

Ignoring the point that flies don't really 'drop' that often, the 450cc class is thinning out rather rapidly. Out front, we've seen Trey Canard come in late, then go out shortly thereafter, then we witnessed Chad Reed and Ryan Dungey both get knocked out of the series – although Dungey should be returning in the

next couple of weeks – along with Andrew Short, Ivan Tedesco, Tommy Hahn, and more while James Stewart is now also hovering in casualty limbo. Meanwhile, seemingly immune to all of this, Ryan Villopoto has finished off of the podium twice in 11 races, and has never finished worse than fifth.

WHARTON TAKES 1ST WIN

Plake Wharton was briefly in the running to take the final spot on the Monster Energy/Pro Circuit Kawasaki team, which eventually went to Darryn Durham. It's unclear what happened in the negotiations but rumor has it that he went to the Rockstar Energy Suzuki team,

in the end, because he was simply offered more money to go there. Some scoffed at this. But Wharton has won a race for the Rockstar Energy Suzuki team, while the Pro Circuit team has yet to win a single event on the Eastern swing of the Lites SX title chase.

DUNGEY TO MISS REST OF SUPERCROSS SEASON?

Ryan Dungey's continued absence from the Supercross paddock gave way to rumours about a date for his possible return. The Red Bull KTM star posted a video update on his Facebook page last weekend indicating that a recovery time will take four to five weeks when he was initially hoping to be able to ride at Daytona. As most people know Dungey broke his collarbone after a slip while practicing in Florida and raced to second place at St Louis several days later despite the discomfort.

He eventually needed surgery and a plate over the crack on Tuesday after the St Louis SX and has now missed Daytona as well as Indianapolis. Chatter at the Lucas Oil Stadium last weekend indicated that the 2010 champion could possibly sit out the rest of the supercross campaign with six rounds remaining in seven weeks and a four-to-six week convalescence due. Dungey delivered the first podiums and two victories for KTM in the SX class with the 450SX-F.









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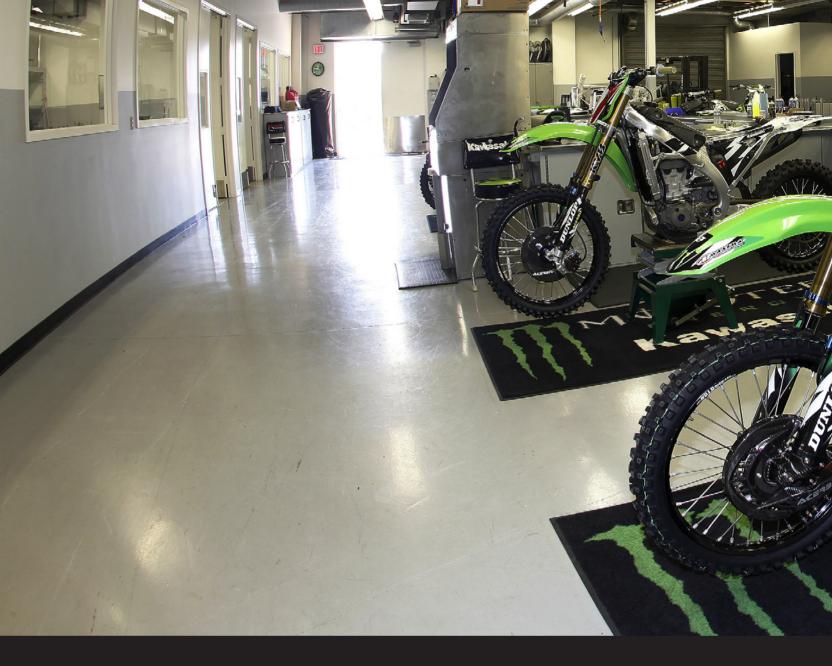












"Our company believes in motocross and supercross and they put some emphasis on it," says Team Manager Dan Fahie. "Our company, KMC, is working hard to make sure the bike is good for our market. We have an R&D facility

Reaching the Factory team...

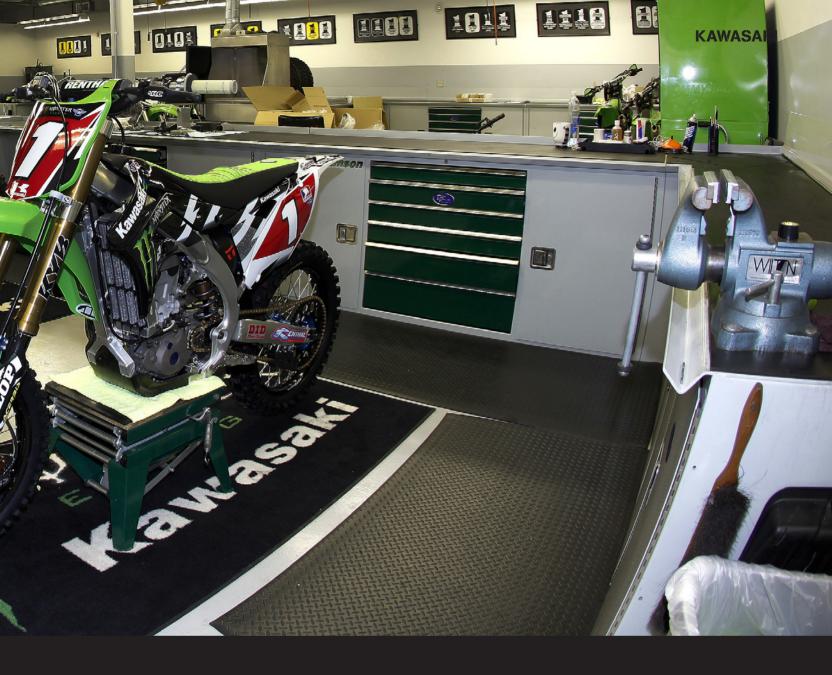
that."

KMC, is working hard to make sure the bike is good for our market. We have an R&D facility here that focuses on our tracks and our kind of riding. I don't think everybody has the same emphasis and it is no more complicated than

Monster Energy Kawasaki, flanked by the might of the Pro Circuit crew up the road in Corona, is the peak of an programme that has strong roots into the junior and amateur ranks thanks to Team Green; a talent filter that boasts the likes of Carmichael, Stewart,

McGrath, Emig, Ward, Windham, Wilson and Villopoto. It means steering a supported-Kawasaki is a position of privilege thanks to the history. "These are, for sure, some of the best days of my career," acknowledges Villopoto's current team-mate Jake Weimer. "I'm living the dream I had when I was a little kid. Sometimes you have to sit back a little bit and evaluate everything because it is tough to really appreciate what you have."

"If you look across the starting line there are an awful lot of guys who were on Kawasakis and through Team Green at some point," says Senior Manager of Racing Reid Nordin. "I love to see that because those kids meant a lot to us when they were growing up but we're competing against them now!"



"Jake and Ryan, even though when they are riding their bikes they look different, in terms of set-up and feedback they are similar," reveals suspension Tech Kaipo Chung. "Being Kawasaki riders they both get the same set of options, parts or set-up to eliminate. If something doesn't work for one then we also give it to the other to check for their feedback. Nine times out of ten they pick the same stuff and that is to do with the KX450-F."







Mike Williamson

Putting in the race time...

AMA SX reached a record high attendance figure of 820,000 spectators across seventeen rounds in 2011. In 2012 new single-race records were set with 71,009 counted through the turnstiles in Atlanta (the same event was the most watched SX race ever thanks to extended live TV coverage of the '12 campaign).

For dirt-bike racing it doesn't get any bigger.

The mammoth supercross audience along with the prestige of the AMA motocross nationals means at least 29 weekends at race circuits for teams and riders. Add the Motocross of Nations, Monster Energy Cup and testing and suddenly there are not many days left from the 365.

"The scheduling is the toughest part but we are also at the top level and when the number one is on your bike you are trying to build the best stuff out there and also looking for ways to improve," says Villopoto's mechanic Mike Williamson.

When your star rider is talking of retirement at the age of 26 (Villopoto is now 23) then the fear of burnout is also prominent. "It is a

never-ending balance," says Fahie. "We have to balance the popularity of the sport with the demands it puts on our participants. Whether we have achieved that balance has yet to be determined but we wont know that for some time. Having said that we have to be able to 'get while the getting is good' and that's the mentality of any rider. Their career spans ten years compared to a normal person's working life of forty. It is much more difficult than people think it is. It takes a special person to get through it but with good planning we can do it."

Villopoto is fully committed but admits that he feels the strain. "It is a seven day a week job until the off-season where I will get around ten days from the whole year of not riding the bike or doing anything. I think something has to give and the only way that can happen is by cutting down some of the races."

Fahie: "It will take some dialogue [to change the schedule] and I don't think it is that simple. We have seventeen races with extremely high turnout at most, close to sell-outs. It is hard to turn that down and turn away from that demand. It means we can have the resources to do what we do. You have to be careful what you wish for."





Mitch Payton & Dean Wilson, '11 MX 250 Champ

Pro Circuit...

The relationship between the factory setup and Mitch Payton's tuning operation haven't always seen eye-to-eye but any sense of a rift was banished at the end of 2011.

Payton carries PC's and Kawasaki's influence into wider circles with an MX2 Grand Prix project (since 2010) and a roll of honour on 125cc two-stroke and 250cc four-stroke machinery that hoists his team as an essential and invaluable step on anyone's career ladder. To-date 47 riders have been through the Pro Circuit ranks with a return of 26 125/Lites/250 AMA Championships.

"There have been bumps in the road in the past but right now it is very smooth between us," says Nordin. "The communication is excellent and we see things from the same spot. We are able to compliment each other right now.

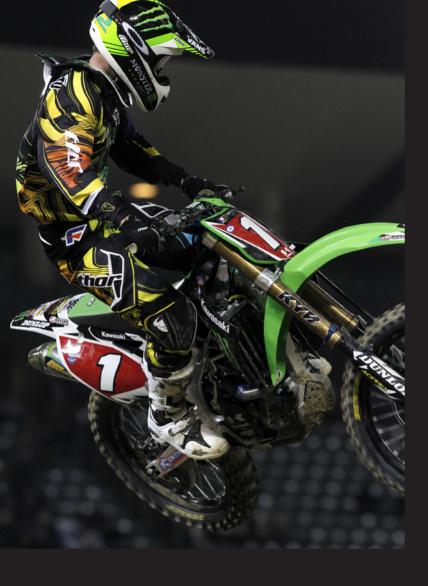
In the last few years the relationship with Pro Circuit and our pro team has been strengthened tremendously. Mitch has faith in Team Green and the riders we choose then we all agree which riders go to his team. It is unfortunate that the process has to narrow by the time it gets to Pro Circuit and our team but it does mean that they are the elite."

"We work with a couple of Pro Circuit people obviously on our exhaust systems and they are basically the factory Kawasaki Lites team," explains Williamson when it comes to day-to-day interaction. "We see them a couple of days a week at the test track and some of our guys go and help them with the fuel injection. Whatever we can help them with then we do."

"I think the effort that we put into Pro Circuit and the belief that we show in Mitch Payton and all those guys is illustrated by our commitment to them and this will continue," adds Fahie.







Ryan Villopoto...

See OTOR's exclusive interview with RV at his California base: http://ontrackof-froad.com/magazine/otor-24th-january-22/?numpage=28

In 2011 Ryan Villopoto won everything there was to gain on a dirt-bike. That he finished the year as Supercross champion after the closest season in living memory is a massive achievement. The six times AMA Champion by the age of 23 is a huge part of the Kawasaki image of success, having won the MX 250 title in his first year as a Pro and having always been astride a KX.

"You know, all these guys are built differently," opines Williamson who has been with Kawasaki for nine years and spannered for Grant Langston, Michael Byrne, Tim Ferry and Stewart. "You really have to change the way you do

things for different riders. Some of them are more sensitive to what you say and others are a little tougher. You definitely have to adjust. Not in the way you work on the motorcycle but how you treat the relationship in general." "He is a pleasure to work with because he is very professional and takes his work very seriously," offers Fahie.

"He is like any other professional however – no different to me with my bosses – in that we all push to get as much as we can. He does the same and that's fine because it is part of his job and I have to balance that out."

"We meet more in the middle these days instead of us just giving him something to ride, which of course is a better way," says Chung. "It didn't always used to be like that. I think his confidence level is way higher and you can see this whether he's testing, practicing, qualifying or racing."

Power of the brand...

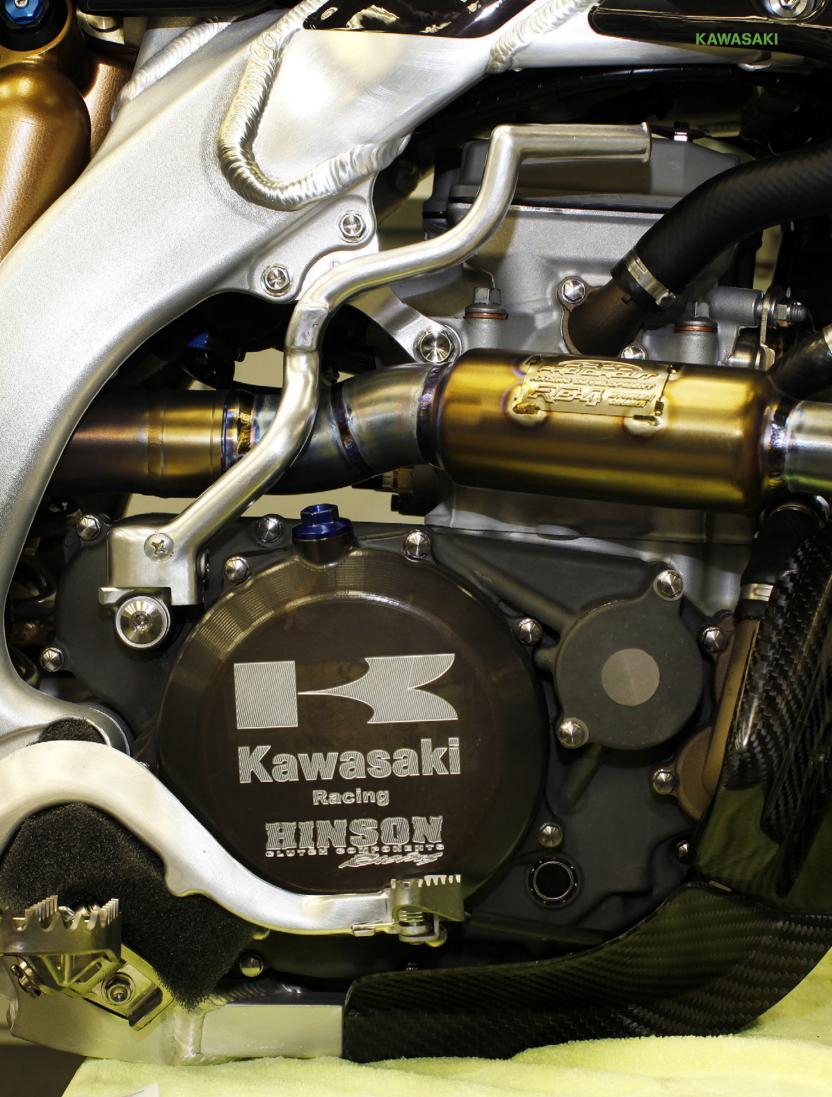
A glance down a paddock lane at a Supercross meeting or a scan through the results sheets reveals that KX technology seems to be the current brand of choice.

"Kawasaki has worked really hard in the last three years to enhance the performance of our bikes," says Nordin. "We are at a point where the KX450F and KX250F are the number one selling off-road motorcycles in the States so I think that is transferring over to people wanting the machines for the track. It is not just our pit or Pro Circuit if you look down the paddock there are a number of other teams and privateers that want to be on Kawasakis now. That is a really positive thing for me because I re-

member years when the only two Kawasakis out there were the factory bikes and from a business standpoint that it pretty sad even though we were winning races. Now we are winning and seeing more entries, it is very gratifying."

"From a market standpoint we are obviously not where we were a few years ago and with that it meant every team had to tighten their belts a little bit." he continues.

"For the business of racing we still do the same things day-in and day-out to achieve success and we will continue. We just have to be careful where we spend our money. It is not as free flowing as it was years ago. We have to make the right decision business-wise to keep a successful team on-track."





BELGIUM STAMPED FOR 2012 GP...SPAIN NEXT?

Belgium's long awaited arrival as part of the 2012 FIM Motocross World Championship was confirmed last week after what seemed like months of internet speculation on the location of the Grand Prix and which of the two vacant slots (round eight on June 17th or round fourteen on September 9th) of the sixteen would be taken.

The town of Bastogne might be more familiar to the outside world for one of the most famous and brutal battles of the second world war in 1944 but it is also home to a twisty circuit that will see GP action for the first time this century in June and is likely to be under siege by fans in northern Europe eager for a high profile preview ahead of the Motocross of Nations at Lommel on September 30th.

As pointed out by the Youthstream press release the visit to populous 50-oddkm south of Liege will be the first to the French-speaking part of the country (the Walloon region) since 2005. The Grand Prix of Nismes seven years ago is renowned for a surprised double moto winning performance by a young Tony Cairoli on his way to a first MX2 title. The event in '05 was also a near washout with the paddock and track surroundings almost impassable thanks to horrendous Belgian rain.

Rockstar Energy Suzuki rider and expected MX1 contender Clement Desalle will be the main local draw (especially with the Belgian adding comments in recent years that Lommel was hardly a 'home' event).

With just three weeks until Easter weekend and the Grand Prix of the Netherlands the calendar is finally nearing completion especially with heavy rumours that Spain will be able to make the list after all and Catalan circuit Bellpuig – host of a GP from 2000 until 2010 – is set to step into the gap between races in Holland (September 2nd) and the series closer in Germany on September 23rd. If the venue an hour outside of Barcelona gets the green light then the penultimate meeting is likely to be a hot one both in terms of climate and importance for the destinations of the MX1 and MX2 crowns.

NAGL OUT UNTIL ROUND FIVE

Red Bull KTM will be understrength in the FIM MX1 World Championship for almost a third of the upcoming campaign after Max Nagl confirmed that he will not ready to compete until June.

The German is still recovering from back surgery and admitted he is unlikely to be in race trim until after the Grand Prix of Brazil (round five of seventeen) on May 20th. If his initial plan is successful then the French round at St Jean D'Angely will be the first time that Tony Cairoli can count on the support of his teammate.

"My physical condition is not good enough and in any case, I have to have more treatment on my back so the decision has been taken that I will not compete in any races until after Brazil," the 24 year old said. "I will be able to continue to improve my physical training and from time to time also be able to get on the bike for some tests."

FROSSARD POISED TO LIFT FIRST 2012 TITLE

istory could repeat this weekend as Monster Energy Yamaha's Steven Frossard stands on the edge of retaining his Elite Italian Championship with the final round of four at the Gazzane di Preseglie.

The Frenchman has been using the four race, five week series as warm-up for the world championship and will head immediately to Belgium and into sandy tracks after what is hoped will be a successful defence this Sunday.

The 2011 MX1 world championship runnerup has a 60 point lead over team-mate David Philippaerts with the ruling allowing the elimination of his worst result from the eight motos contested. Twelve months ago Frossard walked away having bagged a 90,000 euro bonus for his factory team and could bank another major payday with the prize fund for the championship fixed at 150,000 for 2012. Perhaps just as significant for the 24 year old will be his scalping of world champ Tony Cairoli and a healthy degree of confidence on hard-pack with the second and third Grands Prix hitting solid dirt after the sand of Valkenswaard on Easter Monday.

DOVI ON THE DIRT AGAIN

The sight of Monster Energy Tech 3 Yamaha MotoGP racer Andrea Dovizioso barely supressing a grin when picking up one of the vaunted Yamaha Rinaldi Research and Development motocross kits for his YZ250F might have caused some hand-wringing by team boss Herve Poncharal but it is clear the MX-mad Italian is firmly indulging his passion for the dirt after his twelve year GP career with Honda came to an end last winter.

Yamaha's new MotoGP hope set times that placed him near the top of the test sheets after the last IRTA outing at Malaysia in Sepang and while back in Europe the consternation over the 25 year old's recent broken collarbone due to a motocross crash seems to have been swiftly forgotten as 'Dovi' popped up to watch at MX events at Mantova and Castiglione Del Lago and also eagerly visited the Rinaldi workshop near Parma to collect the box of components that will boost the performance of his 250 four-stroke.

Along with Marco Melandri, Dovizioso is no stranger to the motocross Grand Prix paddock and once drove several hundred kilometres after the Dutch TT at Assen to take in the Germany round of the FIM series the following day. It seems the link with the Yamaha factory team and title sponsor has allowed the former 125cc world champion to indulge his off-road obsession even further. "For me it is great to be with Yamaha because I can really enjoy the two sports I love most in my life; to be able to ride motocross and be able to race in MotoGP is a dream," he said. Don't be surprised to see the '4' pictured in action alongside the likes of Philippaerts, Frossard and co pretty soon.



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Control of the contro

A PRIVILEGED VIEW...

By Adam Wheeler

Never being the most technically minded it was an insight over the past two weeks to spend some quality time in the company of Grand Prix riders at the track and watch their mannerisms, attitude and comments when aboard tricked-out machinery with which they will place so much hope and trust over the coming seven months.

In production of the Monster Energy Yamaha photoshoot observing the disparity between the six factory representatives for the team and company in 2012 was quite mind-boggling. The only common denominator amongst the Rinaldi camp in Italy (Charlier, Frossard and Philippaerts shot at Castiglione Del Lago) and the Dixon division (Osborne, Simpson and Tonus at FatCat) was the sense of fun the riders strived to inject into the same monotonous procedure of corner and jump repetition for the cameras.

Aside from the light-heartedness towards the job (an indication of confidence perhaps?) each character had their own individual behaviour, talk, opinions and expressions on their motorcycle.

This is something that is blindly obvious from any professional racer at each of the Grands Prix I have covered for the past eleven years but in this pressure-free environment the joy at manipulating a bike at speed and through the air has never been more apparent. In a way it was the ultimate 'behind the scenes' glimpse at that connection between 'racer and bike' without the added hassle of an actual race meeting getting in the way.

Frossard was extremely meticulous about the position of his bars and levers (and proved during downtime for static shots that the wouldbe Italian Champion can sleep anywhere) and Simpson and Osborne swapped their YZ250 and 450Fs at the end of the shoot for a quick blast and exchanged notes on their respective set-ups with vigour. Overall it was fascinating to see just how much these individuals play around and manhandle a 100kg piece of metal.

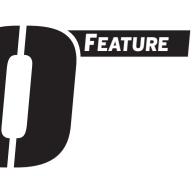
It was the ultimate behind the scenes glimpse...

Riders tend to adopt another guise when they come through the gate at a GP. This is unsurprising, as the race arena is where their job and commitment has to count, but the comments and feelings that are normally made in private or behind a truck door deep in a paddock tend to spill out when a timetable is not being followed and the public gaze is elsewhere. It was impossible not to eavesdrop and for a fan and keen observer into what makes racers and their pursuit such a compelling subject, it was a constant eyebrow raiser.

The togetherness of the riders is something else that shone out in one of those very rare activities they take on as a group and further enforces the view that when it comes to racing it is a lonely world out there.







With all the focus on the state and capabilities of the motorcycles it is easy to forget that the MotoGP paddock is home to other aspects connected with riding and racing.

Although it might be tough to deduce from a distance, the efforts of apparel companies have been progressing heartedly over the last two decades. Thanks to their research and testing the products racers wear have become lighter, stronger and durable and - in some cases over the previous few years - incredibly advanced.

The 'hide' (mostly Kangaroo and synthetic) of a MotoGP rider's back is the closest we might get to sampling an identical facet of the MotoGP experience as thankfully the turnaround from paddock to street is pretty direct. More importantly the onus on safety means that firms like Alpinestars, Dainese, Spidi, Arlen Ness, Berik and Leatt (road racing neck braces are on the horizon) are pushing ahead with ideas and concepts that can positively affect what is a perilous past time.

Airbags have an unremarkable history in motorcycling and have involved heavy materials or a restricting cord connection between the rider and bike but the latest offerings in MotoGP to cloak the riders in a 'self aware' electronic protection system is futuristic stuff and real cutting edge.

Dainese experimented with the possibilities of an electronic racing suit at the beginning of the century and Alpinestars were also laying foundations at the same time. Max Biaggi's Dainese Yamaha leathers concealed a digital hub in the hump that measured his biological performance back in 2001. Dainese were also forceful with their D-Air airbag technology since early prototypes in 2000. Check out this link for the interesting story http://www.dainese.com/us_en/d-air/evoluzione.

Alpinestars have evolved their own Tech Air system and the firm's software/hardware is endorsed by none other than world champion Casey Stoner, Ben Spies and Dani Pedrosa among others. All of the company's athletes were running Tech Air in 2011, the same year that the suit hit the market for the consumer, in direct competition with Dainese. The purpose of the unit situated around the upper back and shoulders is to essentially pad organs and 'crucial anatomy' susceptible to crash damage.

The gestation of the airbag as a protection device has taken the better part of ten years but the pack now used by Alpinestars – renowned for their quality, and adoption of leading race series as hot test beds for their designs - is fascinatingly effective.

Their own description provides a succinct outline: 'The airbag itself is powered by a battery pack and is inflated using a nitrogen-based gas mix. At present, the system incorporates two bags covering the rider's shoulders and collarbones, offering a trigger to full bag inflation time of less than 0.05 seconds and maintaining adequate pressure to provide the rider a minimum of 5 seconds of vital protection'. Look here: http://www.alpinestars.com/safety/





"On average there are around 700 crashes in all three classes of MotoGP each season. In 2011 the average per event was 53..."

For the 'Randy de Puniets' of the world (no offence RdP fans but the Frenchman has led the crash charts on several occasions) the Tech Air's ability to provide a 'double dose' is a distinguishing element: 'A hugely significant step and one crucial for racing use was development of the now patented dual charge system. This innovation offers the rider two airbag inflations without needing to reset or recharge.'

With all the mechanisms and complex algorithms need to manage the deployment involved there is little wonder that it took almost a decade for widespread acceptance on the track and for Tech Air to reach the shops but there is another factor to consider.

"From the outset the company's objective was to produce a system that was entirely self-contained and independent. In other words it could not rely upon any connection with the motorcycle or any other external source," explains Media Communications Manager Jeremy Appleton. "This objective required the development of not only the components of a physical airbag system but also the develop-

ment of an electronic system that was sufficiently sensitive and 'intelligent' - as well as fast enough - to predict an accident and deploy the airbag ahead of the rider's first impact with the ground. On both counts Alpinestars had to develop the technology from a 'clean sheet of paper' as there was no existing technology to adapt."

Riders such as John Hopkins, Jeremy McWilliams and Mika Kallio were essentially the 'guinea pigs' for this data collection that begun in earnest at MotoGP circuits in 2003. The fruits of that period of engineering culminated in Tech Air's successful launch in 2010. "For much of the research period the development work concentrated upon data gathering," continues Appleton. "This required both the design and development of the data collection technology itself, as well as the actual recording and interpretation of data from riders on track in order to build a deep understanding of the movements and forces involved in crashing a motorcycle at speed."

"Once the Tech Air system began testing as a complete, functioning, protection device in 2009 development was rapid but this was only possible after eight years of intensive track R&D in order to have enough data and statistical information to build reliable and fast-acting technology, suitable for racing use."

The cost and manpower placed in Tech Air and similar systems by other companies obviously represents a major investment and while airbag technology can be seen as a flagship project for apparel brands, for a big player like Alpinestars it is all part of their strategy for safety. "We have followed our normal motorcycle racing development policy of using MotoGP as the benchmark for R&D, product performance and development potential," states Appleton. "The Tech Air programme is no different in this respect to other high performance products although with so much data logging and real-time system testing at the track the project called for a higher level of engineering expertise to be present, trackside, throughout the research and development phases than in previous cases."

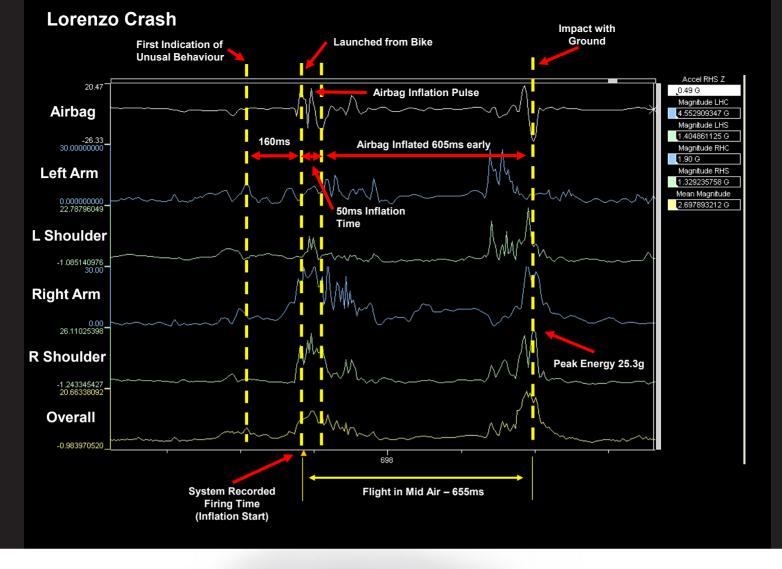
"'Active' protection for rider's safety in future is very important and has the potential both to cut injury figures and to encourage the usage of two-wheeled transport in society as a whole," he adds.

On average there are around 700 crashes throughout three classes in MotoGP each season with an average of almost 53 per event in 2011. Jorge Lorenzo's highside crash at Laguna

Seca last year - shown on the chart in these pages - was an admirable demonstration of the Tech Air's performance. The Spaniard was able to race the next day. With the system already serving a purpose and attracting wide attention you have to wonder how Tech Air and airbags can progress even further. Understandably Alpinestars are a little coy about their direction but reiterate the link between racer and road rider. "We are now conducting further research into the data that is being recorded during tests and race events to look at optimizing the parameters of the control electronics," says Appleton. "Lessons learnt from the Tech Air racing system are being incorporated into the development of our street airbag system for use as an advanced rider protection device for everyday use on the road."

The birth of Tech Air at the highest level means its transference to the street and the customer is aimed at a niche market and comes at a steep price (around, £5000, 6500 euros, \$8000 for a full suit) but this is to be expected at the early stages of the product reaching the hands (or backs) of the public.

Appleton: "Our research and development into a street (road) airbag system for riders to use as an 'everyday' form of protection is well advanced. Testing and evaluation of the system has been going on for some time and the technology is likely to become available within the next 12 to 18 months."

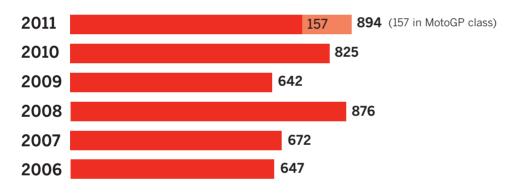








CRASHES IN MotoGP (all three classes)



FALLS BY SESSION IN 2011 (MotoGP)

FP1 FP2 QP Warm-up **Race** 14 **17** 5 **59**

FALLS PER CIRCUIT IN 2011 (all three classes)



Sepang **Assen 71 78**

Jerez **Valencia 71**

Estoril

69

68



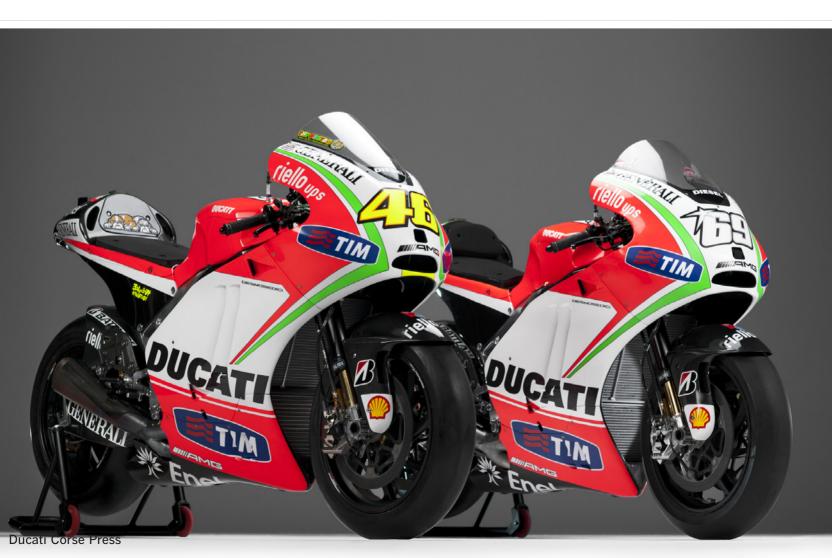
MOTOGP NEWS

FACEBOOK LAUNCH FOR DUCATI AND GP12

After having denied the media present at their annual Wrooom event a glimpse of the GP12 in the Italian Dolomites back in January, Ducati finally presented their new machine and its new white-dominated livery on facebook this week.

Behind the fresh, Italian-themed colour scheme questions still remain about what the mechanical configuration of the new bike. Their chief engineer Filippo Preziosi insists the engine maintains Ducati's traditional 90° L-shape but we are still unsure if has it been moved forward, reversed in the frame, or even reduced to a figure shy of the 1000cc limit.

Preziosi insists that the machine is at 999cc but there will be doubters out there whether he is telling the full story. What is clear is that the machine will need to see further improvements on the outings at Sepang earlier in the year when it hits the Jerez track later this week. Ducati are behind the big two, and whilst the front-end 'washes' seem to be less of a concern, the switch to the aluminium frame should come into its own now with the ability to modify it at shorter notice to react to feedback garnered from the test sessions. The comments from the riding staff hinting at a need to change the way the bike lays its power down to the ground.



GRESINI LAST TO SHOW CRT HAND AT IMOLA

In an outing at Imola last week, Michele Pirro finally got the opportunity to ride the San Carlo Gresini Team's new CRT machine. The Honda-FTR hybrid was the last of the MotoGP bikes to get to track and the Italian admitted that there was a long road ahead but stated there was a great deal of potential.

Once out on the asphalt with the other machines the Jerez test should give a clearer idea of the pecking order of the CRT bikes. So far Randy de Puniet's Aprilia and Colin Edwards' Suter-BMW have been the fastest and most impressive combinations albeit at other ends of the world.

There are rumours around that there could be even more tweaks to the rules at some stage during the season to assist the new hybrid bikes, but that will be more of a case of papering over the cracks rather than a full blown attempt to even up the grid. Rules over standard ECUs and other major amendments would be left until 2013 at the earliest.

It also seems increasingly likely that the CRT bikes will get their own 'championship-within-a-championship' and a spot in parc fermé to encourage sponsors to put their logos on the sides of the new machines.



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LAST CALLS...

By Gavin Emmett

MotoGP testing comes to an end this week in Jerez, with the last official outing in all classes before the season starts proper in Qatar on April 5th. It's a final chance for teams to get rid of any gremlins and fine-tune their machines, albeit under the watchful gaze of the world's media who will be on hand to pick apart any excuses or bold claims they may have.

It's the first time we'll see the whole championship together before Losail, with the Moto2 and Moto3 categories having sole use from Monday to Wednesday and MotoGP from Friday to Sunday with both factory and CRT machines out on track in a real glimpse of what the year ahead may bring. We'll finally get a good look at the Moto2 machines in full race trim – up to now they have been running standard engines – and this should give us all a better picture of where the land lies after a pre-season filled with conjecture and game-playing. The PR spokesmen of many of the Moto2 teams have sounded like market traders hawking their substandard goods up until now.

Last year's runner-up, Marc Márquez, also joins up with the rest of his cronies after his vision problems have caused him to miss previous test opportunities, so it will be interesting to judge what shape he is in. I would suggest that the Spaniard will be not too far from the top positions or quickest times at a track he knows well.

The Moto3 bikes are still in the early stages of development with KTM, Sandro Cortese and Danny Kent having made the running so far, but the likes of Maverick Viñales and Portugal's Miguel Oliveira are appearing at a track they are more than familiar with and will start to show their hand.

Jerez will be the first time we see everyone together before Losail...

Just remember the first season of Moto2 and the number of new winners it threw up and we could be in for something similar in the first season of the new 250cc singles.

Then comes the turn of MotoGP at the weekend and there will be no hiding for the CRT bikes or the Ducati factory for that matter as they come under intense scrutiny just over a couple of weeks before the real evidence of a busy winter is laid bare.

After their online media presentation on Monday the Italian factory have their work cut out to match the Hondas and the Yamahas in the Middle East, and their loyal tifosi will be keen to see that they have made some progress since the disappointing last test in Sepang.



222 FOR 4?

TONY CAIROLI GUNS FOR A FOURTH MX1 CROWN

By Adam Wheeler, photos by Ray Archer/Stefano Taglioni

ony Cairoli hails from Sicily but the Red Bull KTM rider has been standing on his own island for the last three years as the undisputed king of the FIM MX1 Motocross World Championship. Five titles, including '09, '10 and '11 as ruler of the premier class means that the 26 year old - who now splits his time between his birth town of Patti, a residence outside of Rome and another in Lommel, Belgium with Dutch girlfriend/PA Jill - once more enters a Grand Prix campaign as the main target and reference for the now customary troupe of racers all vying for MX1 honours. In truth, more than ten riders are capable of winning an MX1 Grand Prix and most of the factory representatives already have. From that elite there is a firm group of five that will dispute the championship over sixteen events. Cairoli, now an established and excellent ambassador

for the sport and a KTM employee until 2013, is the flamboyant and accommodating 'big fish' in a pond that is brimming at the start of the season. His ability to weather problems and injury niggles and win key events at key moments whatever the terrain have been the hallmarks of his success.

Tony, tired yet of all the questions about your continued motivation for more victories?

Yeah, but it's normal! It's a question I expect. I'm still thinking about riding and racing and not about the fact that I have five world titles or anything like that. Every season brings a new challenge and that's the way to look at it. The winter period feels like the same to me, I'm going to try and win a championship without really thinking about whether it's the first or the fifth.



You spent a long time last winter in the U.S sizing up the scene. What happened this time?

After the Nations I parked the bike for two months. I had the problem with the broken wrist and I needed that time to recover. I started riding again in the second week of December and took it easy. I was lucky because the weather was really good in Italy, so I stayed there a lot and through January also. When the cold finally came in at the end of January we went to Sardinia and did some sand riding for two weeks. I used the break to fix a few financial things that I didn't really have the time or concentration to do during the season. I chilled out and got ready for a new year.

I know you had designs on Supercross. Has that little dream evaporated for good now?

I don't think Supercross is really possible any more. I had the chance when I was around nineteen or twenty to move over there with another Yamaha team, in 2006 I think, but I didn't feel so secure with it. I chose to stay in Europe and then quickly got into a position where I was fighting for titles and it was difficult to give that up. It was hard for me to gauge how a team would have treated me over there. For sure the first year would have been very hard because it is a lifestyle adjustment, not just racing, and supercross is something really different and you'd have to accept you'd struggle at the beginning. I wasn't really riding supercross that much, maybe in comparison to someone like Pourcel who rode more and already had a good level before he moved there. I think I would have needed a year and maybe wouldn't have got it or much more time. I would still like to do some nationals but I don't think I could do a whole campaign. I'm unsure of the lifestyle. I was there for two months last year and at first it all seems brilliant but there are things I don't like too much. I like to be in Italy and I don't think there is anything I could get over there that I don't already have here. I think for an Italian it might be hard to live in California. For Ken [Roczen] I can imagine it is a nice big adventure because I've seen where he comes from in Germany but in Italy I have the beach and everything I like to do. Supercross has that appeal and advantage because of the show and the big audience and all those people taking an interest. It was motivating for a while but not enough to consider moving.

How are things going with your goal of increasing the profile of the sport in Italy?

Not bad. I think I do a lot of things and at Mantova we saw a good crowd, maybe bigger than for a long time. I get a lot of feedback on Twitter and it is really nice to get involved with the fans.

What's your opinion of social media? It seems like a major job for an athlete in your position...

Facebook was getting a bit crazy because there was a lot of stuff going on there, so I only look at my fan page now. Twitter is nice because more and more people are getting into it in Italy. Last year it didn't seem there was much of a following for Twitter but I've notice a big step in the last few months.

It's nice to post videos and pictures. It is a big job to reply to all the messages but I try to answer specific questions.

All this social networking is good for spreading the message about motocross but in another way it is bad because people might decide not to come to the races and instead watch it on the internet or just be happy to see some tweets and the results.





You've made an arrangement whereby your merchandise will be sold alongside that of Valentino Rossi...that's quite a big deal...

For sure, now we have the opportunity to be part of his big sales network and its nice to get my stuff and clothing as part of his rigs that go to MotoGP and events. It is a big improvement. Valentino is one of the most famous sportsmen in the world so if we are doing something together then a lot of people know. He is a nice guy and really like motocross. Together with KTM Italy we presented him with a bike recently and he loved that...

What are your feelings on the current state of the FIM World Championship?

A lot of people complain about the overseas

races and there are teams that have trouble to get there and for sure I understand that but it is a world championship and it's nice to have races in all sorts of places. I think it is good that we go to Brazil, Mexico and Russia.

And what about the return to Maggiora?

Great. It seems crazy to think that a deal can be made that long for one place but if it goes ahead then it will be really nice. It's a good track and a historic place.

The obligatory question concerning your thoughts towards rivals for 2012...?

I don't think there will be much difference to last year. For sure Desalle will be there, Christophe Pourcel and Frossard. The ques-



tion marks might be Philippaerts, Bobryshev and Paulin but going for the title...I guess the same people. Pourcel is a big talent and one of the riders I most like to watch for style and technique but there have been a lot of up and downs.

It reached a point in 2006-7 where the action was getting a bit 'tasty' between you both for the MX2 championship...

I think it is cool that we will race together again. He is not a dirty rider. I have seen worse people in the GPs over the years. He is very technical and his way to overtake also. He is not someone that needs to take you out and if he goes by then that is because he has lined you up. I hope we can still fight like we did in the past.

You are running the 350SX-F again this year. A word on the bike...

The bike is getting better, especially with the suspension because I had some problems with that in some places last season. This year we have already worked a lot on this.

Lastly we will continue to see you to pop up and do fun photoshoots and other PR events throughout 2012?

I had ups and downs last year and sometimes I was motivated to do more things for the sport and sometimes less. I hope this year I can build up the season well and do some fun things.

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'On-track Off-road' is a free, bi-weekly publication for the screen focus-sed on bringing the latest perspectives on events, blogs and some of the very finest photography from the three worlds of the FIM Motocross World Championship, the AMA Motocross and Supercross series' and MotoGP. 'On-track Off-road' will be published online at www.ontrackoffroad.com every other Tuesday. To receive an email notification that a new issue available with a brief description of each edition's contents simply enter an address in the box provided on the homepage. All email addresses will be kept strictly confidential and only used for purposes connected with OTOR.

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